

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 NEW DE 17223 291244Z

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-10 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

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R 290551Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3028

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 17223

FOLLOWING TEL BOMBAY 3227 DTD 24 DEC 75 RCVD NEW DELHI BEING  
REPEATED TO YOU. QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOMBAY 3227

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT IN

SUBJECT: SHEIKH ABDULLAH VISIT

REF: NEW DELHI 17009, BOMBAY 3192

1. APPARENTLY I RECEIVED AN INVITATION TO WHAT WAS INTENDED TO BE  
AN IN-PARTY FUNCTION BECAUSE OF A MIX-UP IN INVITATIONS FOR  
SEVERAL CEREMONIES INAUGURATING BOMBAY'S "KASHMIR WEEK". I WAS  
ONLY CONSULAR CORPS MEMBER PRESENT AT CONGRESS PARTY HEADQUARTERS  
ON EVENING DEC 23, WHEN ABOUT 4,000 PARTY STALWARTS GATHERED FOR  
PRESENTATION BY BPCC PRESIDENT RAJNI PATEL OF TWO MEDICAL VANS  
AND MONEY TO SHEIKH ABDULLAH. AS THE PROCEEDINGS WERE ALL IN  
HINDI, A STATE GOVERNMENT MINISTER INITIALLY ASSIGNED THE  
ADJOINING SEAT WAS DISPLACED TO MAKE ROOM FOR AN INTERPRETER FOR ME  
PROVIDED BY PARTY HEADQUARTERS.

2. OPENING SPEECHES CONSISTED LARGELY OF EXCHANGES OF TRIBUTES  
BETWEEN RAJNI PATEL ON ONE HAND AND PRINCIPAL DONORS (BIRLA  
INDUSTRIES AND AJIT HAKSAR) AND RECIPIENTS (KASHMIRIS) ON THE  
OTHER HAND. THE ONLY INTERESTING NOTE AT THIS STAGE OF THE  
PROCEEDINGS WAS A BRIEF BUT SHARP OFF-MICROPHONE EXCHANGE BETWEEN  
RAJNI PATEL AND GOI STATE MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS, OM MEHTA.

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 17223 291244Z

APPARENTLY BECUAE GOI MINISTER KARAN SINGH DID NOT SHOW UP AT ALL

AND MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER CHAVAN WAS LATE, THERE HAD TO BE A CHANGE IN THE ORDER OF SEATING AND OF SPEECHES. OM MEHTA SEEMED DISPLEASED WITH THE WAY THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS WERE TURNING OUT AND OBJECTED. PATEL ENDED THE EXCHANGE WITH THE DIRECT REMARK TO OM THAT "WHEN I AM IN NEW DELHI I AM UNDER YOUR ORDERS BUT WHEN YOU ARE HERE YOU ARE UNDER MINE." THIS EPISODE UNDERLINED THE PROMINENCE PATEL ENJOYED THROUGHOUT THE DAY. HE WAS ON CENTER STAGE AT ALL CEREMONIES MAKING CRYSTAL CLEAR WHO IS THE RANKING POLITICAL BOSS IN WESTERN INDIA. OTHER MAHARASHTRA LUMINARIES INCLUDING MINISTERS WERE GIVEN NO CHANCE TO BASK IN THE SPOT LIGHT.

3. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT MINISTER OM MEHTA DELIVERED AN IMPASSIONED ATTACK ON THE OPPOSITION IN GUJARAT FOR THEIR CONDUCT OF RECENT RURAL ELECTIONS. HE ASSERTED THAT WHILE THOSE OUT OF POWER ARE ALWAYS ASKING FOR THE PROTECTION OF DEMOCRACY THEY ABUSED THEIR ADVERSARIES WHEN THEY THEMSELVES ATTAINED POWER. HE CLAIMED THE CONGRESS VICTORY MARGIN IN THE GUJARAT RURAL ELECTIONS WOULD HAVE BEEN EVEN GREATER HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE DASTARDLY TACTICS USED BY THE RULING FRONT. HIS REFERENCES TO MURDERERS, CHEATERS AND THE LIKE WERE CONSTANTLY CHEERED BY THE PARTY FAITHFUL.

4. THE LAST SPEECH FOR THE EVENING WAS A 45-MINUTE PLEA FOR UNITY AND TOLERANCE BY SHEIKH ABDULLAH WHICH OFTEN LEFT THE AUDIENCE IN STUNNED SILENCE. THE SHEIKH CALLED FORTHRIGHTLY FOR AN IMMEDIATE LIFTING OF THE EMERGENCY AND IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. HE SAID HIS HEART WAS SAD TO SEE SO MANY PEOPLE WHO HAD FOUGHT SIDE BY SIDE WITH HIM FOR INDIAN INDEPENDENCE BEHIND BARS. HE PROMISED TO CARRY THIS RECOMMENDATION PERSONALLY TO THE PRIME MINISTER. ON MANY OCCASIONS MY INTERPRETER CHECKED HIMSELF AND REMARKED THAT HE COULD HARDLY BELIEVE THAT A STATE GOVERNMENT CHIEF MINISTER WOULD DARE TO MAKE SUCH A SPEECH TO SUCH A LARGE AUDIENCE UNDER CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS IN INDIA. APPARENTLY, BOMBAY'S MAJOR PAPERS MAY ALSO HAVE HAD A PROBLEM IN BELIEVING WHAT THEY WERE HEARING. NEITHER THE TIMES OF INDIA, INDIAN EXPRESS, NOR THE ECONOMIC TIMES MADE ANY REFERENCES TO THE MAIN THEMES OF THE SHEIKH'S ADDRESS. THEY SIMPLY NOTED THE CEREMONY AND STRESSED HIS CALL FOR UNITY. HOWEVER, THE FREE PRESS JOURNAL GAVE TWO-COLUMN FRONT-PAGE PLAY TO SHEIKH'S TALK AND HEADLINED IT "LIFT EMERGENCY," AND ITS ACCOUNT IS CONSISTANT CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 17223 291244Z

WITH THE INTERPRETATION I RECEIVED.

5. THE FREE PRESS JOURNAL ALSO FEATURES A LARGE FRONT-PAGE PICTURE OF THE SHEIKH CALLING ON JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN. HOWEVER, THE BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THEIR MEETING CARRIED NO INDICATION OF THE SUBSTANCE OF THEIR DISCUSSION.

6. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT ALL STOPS ARE BEING PULLED TO GIVE THE

KASHMIRI LEADERS THE WARMEST POSSIBLE WELCOME IN BOMBAY. THE THEMES OF THE PUBLIC GATHERING ARE BROTHERHOOD AND COOPERATION. SUBSTANCE IS LENT TO THE EXERCISE BY THE NUMEROUS SUBSTANTIAL GIFTS PRESENTED TO THE KASHMIRIS. SOME OF THE DONATIONS HAVE BEEN SOLICITED FROM RATHER FAR FIELDS, EG, AJIT HAKSAR IN CALCUTTA. MOST SOPHISTICATE DOBSERVERS HERE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT THE PURPOSE OF THIS EXERCISE IS SIMPLY TO SHOW THAT WESTERN INDIA IS WILLING TO HELP MATERIALLY WITH KASHMIR'S PROBLEMS. THEY BELIEVE THAT THE CONGRESS PARTY WANTS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR SOME LEADERS NOT FULLY IN ACCORD WITH MRS GANDHI'S POLICIES TO PARTICIPATE IN RUNNING THE COUNTRY. IF THIS EXERCISE WAS INDEED INTENDED AS A DEMONSTRATION OF CONGRESS'S HULERANCE, THEY WERE SEVERELY TESTED. ONE MIGHT SAY THAT THE SHEIKH MOVED QUICKLY TO THE BOUNDARY OF TOLERANCE AND EITHER EXTENDED IT OR STEPPED OVER IT ON HIS FIRST DAY IN BOMBAY.

7. I DISCERNED NO ATTEMPT TO EXPLOIT MY ATTENDANCE AT THIS POLITICAL GATHERING. A FEW PHOTOS WERE TAKEN BUT THERE WAS NO EFFORT TO GET ME INTO THE MIDDLE OF THIS MANIFESTATION OF CONGRESS PARTY AFFECTION FOR THE SHEIKH.  
COURTNEY

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